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General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by International Women's Health Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

In the last twenty years, there has been significant progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. However, gaps in implementation remain. For women and young people, this often translates into their inability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights, which in turn diminishes their opportunities, affects their health and infringes on their right to a just and healthy life. Too many women and girls continue to face gender inequalities, violence and significant violations of their human rights.

Despite calls over the past 20 years from women, adolescents and young people for the comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education that they want and need in order to lead safe, healthy and enjoyable lives, these services remain inaccessible to far too many. As a result, more than 200 million women, married or in a union, do not want to be pregnant but lack access to modern contraception, and many more millions who are unmarried lack this vital service. In addition, 8.5 million women, including adolescent girls, experience complications from unsafe abortion annually; 3 million women do not receive necessary abortion care; and almost 50,000 women die due to unsafe abortion.

The 20-year review of the Programme of Action offers Member States and civil society the opportunity to not only assess progress and identify gaps, but also to address emerging issues in the context of population and development. The outcomes of the 2013 regional conferences and expert meetings of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Global Youth Forum and conferences on human rights and women's health all highlight the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain to achieve the goal set out in the Programme of Action of providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights to all people.

We applaud the regional conferences and thematic forums for heading the call to re-commit political will and financial commitments to ensuring the sexual rights of all people; prioritizing the eradication of discrimination against women in matters related to their sexuality as well as those based on sexual orientation and gender identity; and committing to take measures to ensure access to safe, affordable and high-quality sexual and reproductive health services with full respect for women's and young people's human rights and free from violence, coercion and discrimination.

Moving forward, Governments must demonstrate their political commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights by prioritizing the removal of financial and legal obstacles to essential services; the transformation of weak health systems; and the elimination of social and economic inequalities, violence and discrimination.

In addition, we demand that Governments:

- Make universal access to comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health services, counselling and information a reality for all women and adolescent girls, with respect for their human rights and an emphasis on equity and diversity

- Invest in programmes that empower women, especially adolescent girls and young women, to know their bodies and exercise their rights, especially through comprehensive sexuality education
- Protect and promote sexual and reproductive rights as human rights
- Invest in and promote young women's leadership at all levels and types of decision-making

We are hopeful that progress will continue to be made and that Member States will take action for continued progress and implementation of the Programme of Action and subsequent agreements. We are hopeful that we are moving towards a more just world where all people are able to realize their human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights and health.